



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

FOUR TYPES OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT. III.

By PROFESSOR ALEXANDER BALMAIN BRUCE,
Free Church College, Glasgow.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

To whom written.—Its author possibly Apollos of Alexandria.—The vital question concerns the aim of the epistle.—Christianity as contrasted with Leviticalism.—Its superiority seen as respects the agents of revelation and redemption.—Jesus superior to prophets, angels, Moses, and Aaron.—He is the divine Son.—The significance of his humiliation.—Other teachings of the epistle: "Through an eternal spirit;" sanctification; perfection; faith; the Fatherhood of God.

SOME of the questions belonging to the *Introduction* of the Epistle bearing this name are at once important and debatable; especially these: who wrote it? and to whom was it written? The old title "The Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews" no longer commands general acceptance. Most critics deny that Paul was its author, and not a few maintain that it was not addressed to Hebrews as its first readers. On the answer to the former of these questions depends whether we can regard this writing as containing a distinct type of Christian thought; on the answer to the latter our whole conception of its aim and meaning. Of course these questions cannot be gone into here. All one can do is to indicate his position. As to authorship I have no doubt that whoever wrote the Epistle, it was not St. Paul. The style, the characteristic ideas, the temperament, all point to a writer of a different training, cast of mind and religious experience. As to the destination of the Epistle, I am old fashioned enough to hold on to the hypothesis suggested by the title it bears in some ancient MSS. $\Pi\text{Ρ}\text{Ο}\varsigma \text{ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥ}\varsigma$, and, notwithstanding all that Von Soden, Weizsäcker and others have said to the contrary, to accept the view still maintained by Weiss and Beyschlag, that it was written for the benefit of a community of Hebrew Christians, resident either in Palestine or in some other

center where Jews abounded, *e. g.*, Alexandria or Rome. The other alternative, that the first readers were Gentile Christians who had become enamored of Jewish religious custom, seems to me to necessitate very far-fetched interpretations of many particular allusions, and to rob the writing of the significance which springs out of an urgent occasion. The earnest moral tone is intelligible if we assume that the aim is to prevent Hebrew Christians, tempted partly by outward tribulation, but chiefly by a lack of insight into the genius and glory of the Christian faith, from apostatizing to Judaism. On the other hypothesis it is difficult to see in the writing anything more than a piece of theological dilettantism. I think, therefore that the present critical fashion will change, and that scholars ere long will come back to the old idea that this work is an Epistle, or if you will, a treatise, written for the benefit of Hebrew Christians in the religious condition indicated; when, can only be conjectured, but not improbably shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem.

It is an interesting, though not vital, question who, if not Paul, could have written so remarkable a writing, second to none in the New Testament for originality of thought and excellence of style? Apollos of Alexandria, Luther guessed, and though no ancient testimony can be cited in its support, a large and ever growing number of modern critics regard the suggestion with favor. The chief support for it is found in the Alexandrian air of the Epistle. In dialect and thought the writing reminds one of Philo, the famous Alexandrian Jew who flourished about the beginning of the Christian era, and whose works are an elaborate and curious attempt to blend into a harmonious system the religion of the Jews and the philosophy of Plato. One fresh from the study of Philo meets in the Epistle words and phrases with which he is already familiar. Philo's allegorical method of interpretation is paralleled in the section concerning the Melchizedec priesthood, and while Philo's pedantry is wholly absent there is an occasional echo of his theory of the universe, as in the distinction between the heavenly world as the place of realities, and the earthly as the place of shadows. As Apollos was a native of Alexandria, and a learned man, it is natural to think of him

as the author of a writing having such characteristics. But the point of importance is not to determine the name of the author but to note carefully the peculiarities of the literary production. Yet we must be careful not to exaggerate the importance of these. It is, for example, an extravagant assertion to say that only on condition of recognizing the author as a disciple of Philo can one understand the Epistle. It is possible to understand its main drift while keeping your mind in suspense on that question. It is best to commence the study of the Epistle tolerably uncommitted on the point; as you go along keeping your eye open to all clear traces, if any, of affinity with Philo, so that by the time you have arrived at the end of the book you may have at once a distinct conception of the main religious teaching and a probable opinion on the subordinate question as to the alleged connection between the author and the Alexandrine school of Jewish philosophy. That question, however interesting, is in no sense vital.

The vital question is, what is the aim of the Epistle and how does it accomplish its aim? My answer to that is in brief this: It is an apologetic treatise in epistolary form, meant to help Hebrew Christians who had no true insight into the nature and value of the Christian faith, while still bearing the Christian name. The author himself has a very definite conception of the *nature* and a very high estimate of the *value* of Christianity. He regards it as the perfect and therefore the final religion, and he regards it thus because he conceives it as the *religion of free, unrestricted access to God*. Herein, in his judgment, lies the great superiority of Christianity to Leviticalism. The veil between the holy and the most holy place in the tabernacle is for him the symbol of the inherent defectiveness of the earlier religion. God shuts himself up in a dark inaccessible shrine: that cannot be the perfect form of religion. When Christ comes, the veil is rent; the dark inaccessible abode of Jehovah passes away, and the high priest of the New Testament becomes what no high priest of Israel had ever been, a forerunner, going into a place whither we may follow him. *Πρόδρομος*, *forerunner* (Heb. 6:20), that is the key-word of the Epistle; and in the description of

Christianity as the religion of the better hope through which "we draw nigh to God" is to be found its dogmatic center (7:19).

Christianity the religion of free access, Leviticalism the religion of distant ceremonious relations; such is the radical contrast of the Epistle. This central vital contrast suggests the method of comparison as that which may serve the apologetic aim. Instead of saying and trying to prove, as we Westerns might, that Christianity is the absolute, ideally perfect religion, the author says and endeavors to prove in detail that Christianity, is the *better* religion, better than the earlier religion of the Jews in this, that, and the other respect, in all respects important and relevant to the question in hand. In carrying through the comparison he gives expression to thoughts which for one possessing requisite spiritual insight suffice to show that Christianity is not only the better but the best possible, the ideal religion as *e. g.*, when it is said that Jesus offered himself in sacrifice *through the Eternal Spirit*.

The comparison runs through several stages, beginning at the periphery and ending at the center. Christianity, it is taught, is superior to Leviticalism, or the old Hebrew religion, in respect, first, of the agents of *revelation*; second, of the agents of *redemption*. Under each of these general heads are specified two particulars so far as the old religion is concerned; under the first *prophets* and *angels*, under the second *Moses* and *Aaron*. Prophets and angels were both, as popularly conceived, agents of revelation. God spake to the fathers from time to time by the prophets, and in Jewish theology, as in three places of the New Testament (Heb. 2:2, Acts 7:53, Gal. 3:19), was assigned to angels the function of intermediaries between God and the people in the law giving. The law was the "word spoken by angels." The work of redeeming Israel on the other hand is conceived of as distributed between Moses and Aaron, the former being the historic captain of salvation who led God's chosen people from the house of bondage to the promised land, the latter the high priest who acted for the people in things pertaining to God and by his sacerdotal functions kept them in

right relations to God, especially by the ceremonial of the great day of atonement whereby he obtained an *annual* redemption for Israel.

Jesus is compared successively to all these mediators of the old religion, and triumphantly pronounced superior to them one and all; greater than prophets, greater than angels, greater than Moses, greater than Aaron; greater in the very respect in which they were by the Jews accounted and by the author admitted to be great. The contract is least emphatic in reference to the prophets, doubtless because the writer looked on them as belonging in spirit to the new dispensation rather than to the old legal one. Yet even here is a latent antithesis. It is hinted, if not obtrusively asserted, in the description of the prophetic revelation as a piecemeal multiform one (*πολυμερῶς, πολυτρόπως*, 1:1) suggesting that through Jesus Christ there came a revelation which was neither fragmentary nor tropical, but complete and real and therefore final. The superiority of Christ over angels is more vehemently asserted and elaborately proved, the proof winding up with an earnest appeal to give to Christ an amount of attention proportioned to his dignity (2:1-4). The emphasis here is to be understood in the light of contemporary Jewish theology, which assigned to angelic mediation in the natural world and in revelation a place of importance in excess of what was reasonable and wholesome. The writer of our Epistle is not to be understood as endorsing such views, but simply taking them into account in an argument addressed to readers under their influence.

For Moses and Aaron, especially for Moses, the writer had a deeper respect than for angels, whose rôle he probably in his heart regarded as greatly inflated, if not altogether imaginary. These two men were great historic realities, whose functions in behalf of Israel no thoughtful man would dream of disparaging. To Moses as the hero of the Exodus and as the legislator of the new-born nation he gives generous praise as a faithful servant of God. Yet he does not hesitate to set Jesus far above him as worthy of a greater glory (3:3). To exalt Jesus above Aaron was an easier matter. Moses eclipsed Aaron even in Jewish

esteem, and for our author he was incomparably the greater character, and his function the more vitally important. In his view Moses was one of the world's greatest men, and the Exodus was one of the greatest heroic achievements in human history. Aaron with his priestly robes and sacerdotal rites, was by comparison a third-rate figure, standing well in the background of the historic picture. Doubtless the ceremonial of the great day of atonement, which showed the high priest at his best was a very imposing affair, if only the work were well done. But there was the trouble. The whole thing was a mere show, not a real but a putative atonement, bearing fruit, even putatively, only for a single year. Comparison here was an indignity done to Christ; for what was the blood of goats and bulls to the sacrifice of one who through the Eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God?

In these four comparisons, the superiority of Jesus is made to rest on one and the same foundation, that of *His Sonship*. In the end of the days, God spoke to men through One who had the standing of a Son (ἐν υἱῷ, 1:1). Jesus is declared to be greater than angels in virtue of his Sonship. "Unto which of the angels said he at any time, thou art my Son" (1:5). The angelic function, throughout the Old Testament is one of service. "Are they not all (without exception), ministering spirits?" (1:14). Moses too was but a servant in God's house, a most faithful one, on God's own testimony. Moses was faithful as a *servant* but Jesus as a *Son*, and that made all the difference (3:5, 6). Aaron, finally, was also but a servant, and that, too, under the most abject form of servitude: a mere sacerdotal drudge, ever performing ceremonies which had no real value. Of this sacerdotal drudge, of the Levitical system, the writer at the end of his disquisition on Christ's priestly function, with deliberate intent, draws a vivid picture which a Christian eye contemplates with feelings wavering between contempt and pity. "Every priest *standeth daily ministering* and offering *oftentime* the *same* sacrifices which can *never* take away sin." Poor priest with his monotonous, never ending, fruitless toil. How thankful will he be when death comes to relieve him. Compare with this sacerdotal

drudge the great High Priest of humanity who, having by one great act of voluntary sacrifice perfected forever them that are sanctified, sitteth on the right hand of God. He is no mere priestly drudge but one whose native position is that of a Son. "Jesus the Son of God" (4:14), who, though a Son, learned obedience through suffering (5:8), and who after his passion endured with loyal freedom "is consecrated forever more" (7:28), an Eternal Priest in whom the ideal of priesthood is realized.

These four contrasts, of themselves, apart from any express Christological statements, imply a high conception of Christ as the Son. The Sonship of Christ is held to be a guarantee of itself, for a revelation which shall be perfect, therefore final. In the end of the days God spake by a Son: that is enough. No more needs to be said. The rationale of this is that Sonship involves likeness and intimacy. He that knoweth the Son knoweth the Father, and the Son knows all that is in the Father's mind. Sonship sets Christ above angels, however high they may be in the scale of being and in function, because the Son is begotten, while angels, like all other creatures, are made, and, as the heir of his Father, is destined to sit on a throne and be an object of homage to the universe, angels not excepted; Sonship exalts Christ far above Moses, because however high his position in God's house, it can at best be only that of a servant, whereas the Son is over the house as its Master or Lord. Finally, Sonship places Christ as a priest on a different category from Aaron, though he, in his way, was a great personage in Israel's history. To find its analogue you must go out of the Levitical priesthood and go back to the more ancient type of Melchisedec, the *royal* priest, whose priesthood depended not on ancestry, but arose out of his regal dignity, and was exercised in free, gracious condescension through acts of beneficence and blessing.

But the writer is not content with suggesting through such contrasts a lofty conception of the Person of Christ. At the very outset, having referred to the Son, he proceeds forthwith to unfold his idea of the position of the Son in relation to God and the universe. The result is a sublime picture of the Son as the radiance of the Divine Glory and the exact image of the Divine

Essence, as of a seal stamped upon wax, and as maker and sustainer of the universe whereof also he is heir and Lord. The place thus assigned to the Son is as exalted as that of the Logos in the system of Philo which may have exercised an influence on the delineation, and in the New Testament the only thing that can be compared with this Christological statement is the prologue of the Fourth Gospel. For the writer of our Epistle Christ is a Divine Being possessing the properties, the power, and the majesty of Deity.

But how could so august a being have an experience of temptation and suffering like that of Jesus? In that direction lay one of the chief perplexities of the Hebrew Christians for whom the Epistle was written. They could not reconcile the humiliation of *Jesus* with the dignity of *Christ*. The solution of that problem was one of the tasks our author had to face. He deals with it in a masterly way, especially in the passage 2:9-18. The principle of his solution is that humiliation and glory are not mutually exclusive, not an absolute but only a relative antithesis; there can be glory even in the humiliation. So it was in the case of Jesus. His temptations and sufferings were but incidents in the honorable career of the Captain of salvation, like the wounds received by a general in a great battle out of which he comes triumphant. So far from being a disgrace to the Christ and the Son to endure such experiences, it was a grace and favor shown to him by God to give him the opportunity of passing through them in connection with his high vocation (2:9). To suffer may be humbling, but to suffer for others? That may be glorious. It depends on the cause on which you suffer. The salvation of men is a God-worthy *end*; the method of captaincy is a good *method*. The method involves that the leader shall be like the led in nature and experience; a *man*, and a *man* of *sorrow*, sharing the dangers of the way, and the more like in experience the better a captain he will be, the more sympathetic and comrade-like and the more trusted by those who follow. Therefore "it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering" (2:10).

Such, in substance is the writer's rationale of the earthly

experience of Christ which has been a stumbling block to Hebrew Christians. The apologetic occasion led him to lay stress on aspects of that experience not much insisted on by Paul. In the Epistle to the Hebrews the sufferings of Christ appear as a discipline by which he acquired the sympathy which is viewed as the great source of power both to a captain like Moses and for a priest like Aaron. But this is not a full account of the teaching of our Epistle on the subject of Christ's sufferings and their significance. Great thoughts occur here and there casting sudden flashes of deep insight on that central theme. Among these a foremost place is due to that in which it is declared that sanctifier and sanctified are all of one (2:11), and that other in which Jesus is represented as offering himself a sacrifice *through an eternal spirit* (9:14). The former enunciates the principle of redemption, the latter explains the infinite efficacy of redemption achieved. Solidarity between sanctifier and sanctified: one in all possible respects, the more the better, the one radical difference of holy and unholy always excepted; the more points of contact the greater the sanctifying power. This is essentially the same idea we meet with in Paul's Epistles. "Through an eternal spirit," a profoundly suggestive phrase in the interpretation of which theologians are not agreed, but which, in my mind has ever been associated with certain broad thoughts that help me to understand the value of Christ's self-offering as compared with Levitical victims. First of all Christ's offering was an affair of *spirit* and not merely of blood-shedding. It expressed a *mind* on the part of the victim and thereby it differed *toto coelo* from all Levitical sacrifices. Then, though it is not said, it goes without saying, that that mind had certain moral characters. Jesus offered *himself*. Therefore the mind expressed in his sacrifice was *free, loving and holy*, a mind of highest moral value in the sight of God and of men. But neither of these attributes is used to qualify the spirit in which Jesus offered himself to God. The epithet selected is "eternal." It is a favorite epithet with the writer. He uses it again and again, applying it to all things pertaining to the Christian religion with a view to teach that Christianity is the eternal religion. He speaks of an "eternal salvation," an "eternal redemption," an "eternal inheritance," an "eternal covenant,"

and here of an "eternal spirit." The epithet in this place serves the purpose of raising the sacrifice of Christ above the limits of time. Spirit is in its nature eternal, and the sacrifice of Christ as a spiritual transaction has an efficacy and value valid for all time; for the time that went before the Christian era, as well as for all time after. It is not a mere historical event that had no influence before it took place, and that after it happened exercised an influence destined to wane with the lapse of ages. It is an eternal fact that has absolute value for God from everlasting to everlasting. Thus interpreted the phrase "through an eternal spirit" exhibits on the part of the writer an ethical and philosophical insight which places him on the highest level of Christian thought. Nothing better, truer, more penetrating, or more felicitous has been said or can be said on the subject.

Before leaving the topic of Soteriology some peculiarities in the phraseology of our Epistle as compared with the Apostle Paul may be briefly noted. One is the sense in which the word "sanctify" is used. In Paul's Epistles the word is used in an ethical sense = to make holy in heart and life. In our Epistle, I think, the word is used occasionally in this sense. But in some passages, it bears the sense: to put in right covenant relations, as in 10:14: "By one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." The "sanctified," in this theocratic sense are equivalent to Paul's "justified." In 2:11 I think the word *ἀγιαζόμενοι* should be taken in both senses. The principle: "Sanctifier and sanctified one" holds good under both aspects. Another very prominent word in the Epistle is "to perfect." This is sometimes used in a sense equivalent to Paul's "justify," as where it is affirmed of the Levitical sacrifices that they could not perfect (*τελειῶσαι*) the worshiper as to conscience, *i. e.*, give him a complete sense of forgiveness. In general the word means "to reach the end," and the specific sense depends on the nature of the end contemplated in any given case. Thus perfecting as applied to Christ in 2:10 signifies to make him a thoroughly fit Captain of Salvation, and the way by which the end is supposed to be reached is a curriculum of temptation and suffering through which are fostered the qualities requisite in a captain: heroic patience, sympathy, and the like. Finally *faith* is a great word

in our Epistle, as in the Pauline literature, but its use here is not quite the same as there. In the Pauline system, faith has two functions: it receives the righteousness of God and it works through love toward personal holiness. In our Epistle the former function is not in evidence; where we should expect faith, we find obedience, as in the text: "He became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him" (5:9). The nearest approach to the peculiar Pauline sense of justifying faith is in 10:22: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith," where faith signifies confident expectation of welcome for Christ's sake. The other function of faith as a power making for personal righteousness, is especially prominent in chapter 11, where it is exhibited in a series of instances as helping men to make their lives sublime, through its magical virtue in transforming the future into a present and the unseen into a thing visible.

The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of men, so central in Christ's own teaching, are by no means prominent in our Epistle. They do appear, but chiefly in the concluding hortatory section. In the doctrinal part the Fatherhood of God is referred to or implied mainly in reference to the Sonship of Christ. In the hortatory section, God is called "the Father of Spirits" (12:9), and it is taught that he has for his supreme aim in all his dealings with his children to make them partakers of his holiness (12:10). While the Sonship of believers is not strongly asserted, or, as in the Pauline letters, notably formulated, the privilege of sonship is adequately covered by the great conception of Christianity as the religion of free access. Believers have free entry into the Father's house, and are the house and family of God. And the duty is inculcated upon them of realizing their privileges in the spirit of sonship. The one great counsel of the writer to his readers is *draw near*. That believers are the brethren of Christ and therefore by implication the Sons of God, is beautifully taught in the words put into the mouth of the sanctifier—citations from the Old Testament scriptures, all showing that he is not ashamed to call them brethren. It is with this brotherhood between Jesus and Christians in view that those who are being led to glory by the Captain of Salvation are called *Sons* (2:10).